

ST. ANNE'S

THE DRUGS CASE

AND THE IMMIGRATION BILL.

An attempt to analyse the racial situation in Nottingham, with special reference to the proposed new Immigration Bill.

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+      FIGHT THE IMMIGRATION BILL !      +  
+      PROTEST MARCH AND RALLY, FRI. 26th.FEB.  +  
+      SLAB SQUARE....7p.m.      +  
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St. Anns, Drugs and the Immigration Bill.

A key moment in any analysis of race relations in Nottingham occurred in the late 1950's - the St. Ann's Race Riot. The immediate causes of the riot were obscure: undeniably the media exaggerated the extent of the disturbances; but for a series of nights white youths did swarm up and down St. Ann's Well Road beating up Blacks. In the words of one of the participants, they would drive up and down and then suddenly "nip out and do a nig". The response of the Authorities was immediate, it had to be, at least a token gesture was needed. Local Industry badly needed immigrant labour and therefore it was essential that the bad publicity be countered. The hour produces the man and the man produced by Nottingham's liberal hour was Eric Irons. Mr. Irons became a community officer and later a J.P. He was a nice man who held "moderate views, offended nobody and, best of all, was black. And all the murmurings of the Afro-West Indian Union and all the other "extremists" about Uncle Toms couldn't change the colour of Mr. Iron's skin.

The strategy was clear protests by Black people about the repression they experience from a racist society were to be funnelled into the official channels. Black organizations were to be incorporated into the Local Authorities or even, (as was the West Indian Students Union) sponsored by them. The Race Relations Act and Board were imaginative extensions of this exercise and represent the liberal or soft cap mode of "dealing" with Blacks by a racist society.

The impotence of the Race Relations Board was exposed, in Nottingham, by the Mechanic's Arms affair: it was thought that a pub in St. Anns practised a colour bar. A group, that formed itself into the Anti-Colour Bar Campaign, went to test these allegations. The Whites were served and the Blacks were not. When a White brought a beer for a Black, the drink was snatched back and poured away by a barman. Here was a clear case of discrimination within the meaning of the act. The Race Relations Board were approached. They stressed the necessity of avoiding direct action; they took statements; they took their time, and they dropped the case. But the direct action went on. It was left to the A.C.B.C. to appeal against the publican's license. The appeal was lost, which surprised nobody involved, but highlights included sworn evidence by a Police informer that the A.C.B.C. was planning to burn down the pub and a very audible "whisper" from one of the police that the Blacks should "go home".

Co-existing beside and as a necessary compliment to the soft cap treatment is the hard cap. Relationships between Blacks and the police in Nottingham have never been happy and this goes right back to the '50s when Athelstan Pepkess (who was rumoured to have connections with Oswald Mosley) was Chief Constable. Over the past period this relationship has slumped to an all time low. The majority of Blacks see the Police as antagonists whose job it is to keep them in line. This control relies upon the existence of a large number of informers. Now there are very few social centres catering for West Indians and it has been argued that this is by policy, for as a consequence there has been a mushrooming of shebeens or illegal drinking clubs. It is further argued that these clubs can only exist with Police acquiescence and that the price the shebeen owner pays for his immunity is to act as an informer. The whole thing became big news with the recent Drugs Trial, when three Black informers took three members of the Vice Squad to court on charges of causing them to plant drugs on other Blacks. Pegaman Robinson even accused a member of the Vice Squad

of giving him cannabis to sell and then demanding a kick back. The case has been discussed in detail in "Red Mole" and in "Private Eye" and it would be pointless to rehash this material but some conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, the Black community overwhelmingly believes the charges to be true, in spite of the court's verdict.

Secondly, and this became obvious when working for the meeting in St. Ann's called by the A.C.B.C. to discuss the case, a large section of Black people were scared of the Police; they were too scared to attend the meeting and they admitted as much. Their fears were not totally unjustified in that a large man stood at the entrance to the meeting, noticing who went in. He claimed to be a reporter from Associated Press, but members of the audience identified him as a plain-clothes man from Canning Circus Station !

British capitalism needs immigrant labour particularly to fill unskilled jobs. The immigrants can be used as a pressure on the labour market and to play a limited role in difusing discontent in the white working class by taking over low paid mechanical jobs, thus allowing marginally more money to go to sectors of the white workers. On the other hand, immigrants intriduce a degree of instability into the system. They are not prisoners of the debilitating ideology of Labourism and therefore represent a challenge to authority because of their alienation from "accepted" political standards. It is this contradiction that capitalism tries to straddle with the two pronged strategy of integration and repression. The balance between these components is not arbitrary or determined by the good will available, but is a function of the intensity of the class struggle.

The dominant reality of contemporary politics is the employers' offensive against the working class. In this context, the proposed Immigration Bill can only be seen as a logical corollary to the Industrial Relations Bill. The provisions of the proposed Immigration Bill are still not clear but sufficient information exists to enable some broad generalisations to be made.

The privileges given to "patrial" (i.e. White) immigrants very clearly formalise the second class citizenship of the Black (non-patrial) immigrants. The five year probationary period before an application can be made for full citizenship further exaggerates this formal division. Since British citizenship is no longer automatic but depends upon "good behaviour", there will exist the possibility of creating a scab force that will be unwilling to take risks and participate in strikes.

Control over the Black community will be increased by the extension of the aliens category, which will force them to report to Police-stations and carry identification papers. This last provision is virtually an incitement to the Police to harras Blacks and it is not surprising that the Police Federation, recognising the practical implications of this in ghetto areas, are opposing these clauses.

In the Nottingham situation this Bill could be the last straw. It has to be fought and smashed - not just an opposition to certain clauses but a total opposition to this Bill and all other Immigration Bills. Furthermore, it must be opposed and fought not just as a nasty bit of racialism but as a key component in the present anti working class offensive.
